

FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB OF BALLARAT EXCURSION / NEWS SHEET

JULY, 1980

Meeting ... JULY 4TH - "FUNGI" - speaker Mrs. P. Chuck.

Meeting ..AUGUST 1ST - "THE ORANGE-BELLIED PARROT" - Speaker Mr. C. Anderson.

Excursion ..SATURDAY JULY 5TH : Half Day - FUNGI, INVERMAY - Mrs. P. Chuck, Meet Crocker's 1.30 p.m. or N.W. Corner Deveton & Norman

Excursion Streets 1.40 p.m.

..SUNDAY AUGUST 3RD : Full Day. - The Spit and Werribee -
(see special requirements inside) - C. Anderson



President : Mr. R. BORCH Phone 42 8630;

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Meetings, as specified, are held in the Administration Building of the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street South, Ballarat, commencing 8 pm.

EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, Cnr. STURT and ARMSTRONG STREETS, BALLARAT, AT 9.30 am FOR FULL DAY OUTINGS, OR AT 1.30 pm FOR HALF DAY.

THE SECOND STELLA BEDGGOOD MEMORIAL LECTURE

ST. PAUL'S HALL, FRIDAY 6TH JUNE, 1980

There were many family members, friends and interested people who gathered to commemorate the late Stella Bedggood. Mrs. Bedggood had been a life member and former secretary of this club who worked tirelessly to promote the conservation of our natural heritage and to share her knowledge and love of our flora and fauna.

The guest for the evening was Miss Helen Aston, a friend of Stella's, who had shared field trips together. Helen Aston is the 1979 winner of the Australian Natural History Medallion and senior botanist at the National Herbarium of Victoria. Her professional expertise supports her concern for the natural beauty of our country, the importance of accurate data to support research work and the conservation of flora and fauna. Her membership and active participation in various societies of the natural sciences further emphasizes the dedication Helen has to promote and share the vast field of knowledge available and to show how little is known in many areas and aspects of bird and plant life.

Helen Aston's active membership in many related organizations and her publications and papers are examples of the theme of her lecture: that membership of an organization like the Field Naturalist Club of Victoria concerns not only the social aspect of sharing similar interests and listening to good talks but it requires the aspects of accurate data recording, research and analysis to benefit all Australians, professional and non-professional in the understanding and conserving of our unique world.

She gave detail of the development of both the Natural History Field Clubs of England over 300 years and the Field Naturalist Club of Victoria over 100 years, making the point that there had been similar development. Early members were concerned only with the collecting of material/specimens. People met for social reasons with little evidence of pooling of ideas of scientific knowledge. Much later in the history of both these organizations came the pressure from students to develop organized, voluntary research. Professional scientists had been working within these groups but their papers had been more for their associates. There had been little acceptance of the help volunteers or non-professionals could give to assist in research, analysis and measurement of data. Such publications as "The Atlas of Australian Birds" to be published by the Royal

Australasian Ornithological Union would not be possible today if it weren't for the work of thousands of volunteers.

Helen Aston places much importance on her field trips - not only for the scientific information that can be gained and shared but also for the opportunities of living and travelling with friends sharing similar interests and values in life. She was able to develop her lecture from the listing of historical events to the on-going research and fact finding field trips she participates in.

The audience was shown slides of a R.A.O.U. trip to the Nullabor in August 1979 to collect records for the Field Atlas of Australian Birds. With photographs it was possible to understand how land formation and climate affect the habitat of birds in that area and how the particular season - dry or wet - dictates the variety of species and number of birds seen - nesting or migrating.

The evening finished with supper and an opportunity to meet friends.

Margaret Tonkin.

A VISIT TO THE LINTON DISTRICT

As Miss Helen Aston was to be in Ballarat on Saturday 7th June a few members accompanied her to the Linton district - to three contrasting areas.

Firstly we went to the 92 mile-post block, an area of approximately 50 acres. The proceeds from our monthly Trading Table assists in the up-keep of this block. Some *Correa reflexa*, and *Acacia geuistifolia* (syn. *A. diffusa*) the Spreading Wattle were in flower. There were many orchid leaves, signalling a good spring showing of these flowers. Also in evidence were many species of fungi. The block supports stands of *Casuarina littoralis*, the Black She-oak, rare in the area and *Leptospermum myrsinoides*, the Silky Tea-tree, other acacias and Stringybark Eucalypts, amongst many other varied flora species. This area has not been grazed nor had a fire through it to our knowledge and has had little disturbance from man. The few noxious weeds which are growing there we hope to grub out during our working bee. There are many old trees offering ideal nesting hollows. Twenty-one species of birds were observed on this block as well as some wallabies. Members who are not familiar with the block would be rewarded by a visit.

By contrast the B.O.C. Block has evidence of man's planning. We only visited the area near the dam, but could see the reason why the venue for our working bee was altered. Roger Thomas has been busy working in the area and there is now a foot bridge over the creek. The plants on the north side of the creek have recently been planted and contrast with the well established plants on the South side. Thirteen species of birds were seen on this block and with the Grevilleas and Hakeas in flower the Honeyeaters were particularly busy.

Time allowed only for a quick visit to the Devil's Kitchen. There were no signs of Peregrine Falcons but we did see two Brown Hawks which had disturbed a couple of magpies. Some of the Correa growing on the cliffs has suffered from the dry spell earlier this year. Before leaving the area some children, who had been exploring one of the caves, appeared. They were in a shocked state - they had seen a "ghost".

The day was overcast but calm. The following 33 bird species were seen for the day - Little Grebe, Coot, Spur-winged Plover, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Long-billed Corella, Crimson Rosella, Rufous-tailed Bronze Cockoo, Laughing Kookaburra, Welcome Swallow, Blackbird, Superb Blue Wren, Striated, Brown and Buff-winged Thornbills, Jacky Winter, Scarlet and Southern Yellow, Robins, Grey Fantail, Restless Flycatcher, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike Thrush, Shrike-tit, Orange-winged Sittella, White-throated Tree-creeper, White-eared, Brown-headed and Yellow-winged Honeyeaters, Easter Spinebill, White-winged Chough, Grey Currawong, Magpie and Raven.

Just south of the Haddon Shooting Range turn-off we stopped to observe and listen to the raucous sound of a flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos all "talking" to one another, as they wheeled over the pine trees - Helen Aston counted 152 birds - what a fitting finale to our interesting day.

H. Burgess.

W.V.F.N.C.A. CAMP OUT

15th, 16th, 17th August, 1980

PROGRAMME FOR WEEK-END

Friday Evening. 15th August, 1980. 8 p.m.

M.M.F.N.T. General Meeting (All Welcome)

Friday Evening

(contd.)

Including Specimens and Observations and Slide of the Evening which is FURRY NATIVES.

Visitors are very welcome to attend and to participate. Social Evening to follow. Supper will be provided.

Saturday a.m. "Do it Yourself"

As the camp backs onto Nyah Forest and joins Wood Wood Reserve a morning of wandering and exploring is suggested.

1 p.m. Sharp - Leave Wood Wood, proceed to Towan Plains - - Typical Mallee Salt Pans.

6.30 p.m. W.F.N.C.A. MEETING

8.30 p.m. Arranged Programme. Speaker etc. Supper Provided.

Sunday 9 a.m. Leave Wood Wood for Wandown Reserve. Provide your own lunch.

4 p.m. (approx) - Farewell from Kulki Kulki.

R.S.V.P. 31st July, 1980.

For reservations contact our secretary, Miss H. Burgess.

SPARGO CREEK -POWERFUL OWL EXCURSION

Following a suggestion of Wally Coles, fourteen of us, on a cold, overcast Sunday 8th June, set out for the Wombat State Forest, principally to look for the Powerful Owl and the Red-browed Tree Creeper in the Spargo Creek area, the very west of the latter bird's range. The part of the bush in which the owls had been spotted was damp, still and extremely cold, with a small dried up creek passing through it. We got off to a good start by finding what was apparently a Powerful Owl sitting in the hollow of a tree, but it turned out to be a new species which we named "Woodus branchus".

After about 15 minutes of searching, to our delight two Powerful Owls were spotted sitting next to each other on a branch 40 to 50 feet above the ground. Both stood about 20 inches high, and with their dark backs and heads, and their light fronts with multiple chevron markings, looked very striking. They stared back at us while we watched and photographed and, apart from occasionally turning their heads, did not move.

We continued on down what was once a track looking at the honeyeaters, spinebills and thornbills feeding amongst the profusion of eucalypt

blossom. Because of the dampness of the forest floor, there was a lot of fungi everywhere and it would have been an ideal place for a fungi hunt. To our delight the red-browed tree creeper, ripping bark from trees, made its presence heard, and it soon came into view.

After afternoon tea most of the party left, though a few of us explored another track and had a puzzling time trying to identify a flock of thornbills. We finished off the excursion by inspecting some fresh wombat diggings, looking at crimson rosellas feeding and dropping flowers from trees and watching a grey fantail.

Jonathan Hawley.

LINTON WORKING BEE

Saturday June 21st, in rather pleasant, mild weather, a small group armed with forks, spades, mattocks etc. etc., declared war on the noxious weed population of the "Linton Block". After much grubbing of blackberries, briar roses, lavender, some furze and hawthorn, one very bright soul suggested we were "Suckers pulling suckers" whilst another thought that one of the late Peter Dawson's favourite songs "Roots, Roots, Roots" (or was it "Boots, Boots, Boots"!!) rather appropriate. We heartlessly filled in rabbit holes, disturbing two lovely would-be roast dinners in the process.

Some bushes of *Acacia genistifolia* were flowering beautifully, and we were able to enjoy observing and listening to several feathered friends, including Restless Flycatcher, Wrens, Honeyeaters, Choughs, Golden Whistler, Magpies, Ravens and Kookaburras. All in all a satisfying and useful exercise.

Florence Williamson.

ORANGE-BELLIED PARROT - SURVEY AND EXCURSION

Sunday August 3rd

The world's rarest parrot - the Orange-bellied Parrot *Neophema* species is threatened by the development of a petro-chemical complex on its wintering habitat at Point Wilson. The club excursion on Sunday August 3rd to see this endangered parrot will be to Swan Island and/or Edward Point near Queenscliff. Visitors' passes from the Army Authorities will be needed. (see below). Because the parrots inhabit only a few hundred metres of Swan Island there is a much greater chance of seeing them there than at the Spit (Point Wilson) or Edward Point.

Volunteer surveys are undertaken about every month at the Spit but few observers are allowed there because of increasing vegetation damage

and disturbance of this bird. Surveys have indicated a total population of about one hundred. This brilliantly coloured grass-green parrot has bright light blue and dark blue stripes on its wings and the same above its eyes and is really the most colourful of the Neophema. Historically, thousands occasionally existed at the turn of the century but only in the odd population explosion. Nesting was reliably reported only three times.

The bird is partly nocturnal and every year migrates from S-W Tasmania (some breeding grounds recently discovered) to coastal Victoria and South Australia in autumn, and then back again in spring. Interestingly, although only five nesting pairs were found this season, it appears that 30 juveniles out of 60/70 birds were seen in the migration. Identification of this parrot is quite possible after one or two initial experiences. Sexing and identification of juveniles is possible but difficult.

Migratory and other waders may occur at all of these areas although it's probably a month or two too early for large numbers.

As Swan Island is a Military Restricted Area - even the golf course part is restricted, anyone wanting to go there should supply their full name and address to me by the July 4th meeting.

Charles Anderson.

ROADSIDE ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

On Friday 20th June Edna and I attended the Presentation of Roadside Environment Awards in Melbourne.

Some 60 persons were present in the Room of the Premiers Department to partake of refreshment and conversation before the presentation.

E.V. Adamson of NRCL as chairman introduced Mr. H.A. Storey, representing the Premier who announced the winners and presented the awards as follows :

Category I - for Sympathetic treatment of the natural environment :-
for Reconstruction of Sherbrooke Rd, jointly to save the Dandenongs League and the Sherbrooke Shire Council.

Category II - for Sympathetic treatment of historical or cultural environment :- for construction of the Lygon St. Median Strip between Grattan and Elgin Sts. to the City Engineer and the Parks and Gardens Departments of Melbourne City Council.

Category III- for Sympathetic treatment of roadsides for the interest and enjoyment of the roaduser :- For the development of

Debies Highway Roadside Park - to the Dept. of Crown Lands & Survey.

Mr. H.G. (Budge) Bleakley, convener of the Awards Committee, spoke on the task of judging the 37 entries received, and as no 2nd prizes were given Honorable mention was made for :-

CAT I - 300 metres of Roadside at Bullengareet, on the Gisborne - Bacchus Marsh Roadside.

CAT II - Reconstruction of Service Road at Portsea, to Flinders Shire Council.

CAT III - Reverbank Park restoration at Echuca - to Echuca Shire Council.

Afterwards he spoke to as many as possible who had made submissions. Thanks were extended to Mrs. Kerry Willis, executive officer of the committee, Mr. Dewar Goode, representing the National Trust on the committee for the last six years and to Mr. Charles Anderson who initiated the idea of the awards. A very interesting and enjoyable evening.

Peter Fry.

(A conference on Roadsides of Today and Tomorrow was held the following day and will be reported in a later issue - Editor)

BROWN FALCONS AT NERRIN NERRIN SWAMP

During Easter Dad and I were at Nerrin Nerrin Swamp and in a paddock of burnt off stubble we spotted a brown falcon standing there. On closer inspection we realized that there were 30 of them, either standing, hopping a few paces or flying just above the ground for a short distance. We deduced that they must have been feeding off the crickets that were around, and easily accessible on the bare ground.

Jonathon Hawley.